

# "Piping plover numbers continue to increase in Rhode Island"

During the 2011 nesting season, the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge (RINWRC) staff monitored and managed 12 beaches both on and off-refuge for federally threatened piping plovers, least terns and American oystercatchers. Piping plover numbers continue to increase in Rhode Island and this year the state supported 87 pairs, 77 of which were on lands managed by the RINWRC. Overall Rhode Island produced 128 chicks that survived to fledging, or had the ability to fly, for a 1.49 productivity. We calculate productivity by dividing the number of fledged chicks by the number of pairs that were monitored. This productivity is just below the 1.5 goal set from the Atlantic Coast Piping Plover Recovery Plan that is needed to maintain an increasing population.

Piping plover highlights this year include high productivity at Trustum Pond National Wildlife Refuge in South Kingstown and continued high plover numbers at East Beach Watch Hill in Westerly. Trustum Pond supported 11 pairs this year with a total of 29 fledged chicks while 21 pairs nested at East Beach Watch Hill with 39 chicks fledged. East Beach Watch Hill continues to support the highest number of plover pairs in the state and the Service's partnership with the beach association and the private landowners accounts for the birds' success at the site. Predation continues to be a problem at a number of beaches and was the cause of low hatching and fledging rates at Ninigret Conservation Area, Sandy Point and Napatree Point.

Staff managed an additional site this year, Sandy Point, a thirty-five acre barrier island located in Little Narragansett Bay and owned by the Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. This was the first year the Refuge managed the island with support from the Southern New England Coastal Program (SNEP). Piping plover and American oystercatcher numbers continue to increase there with the Service's management and this year the island provided nesting habitat for 8 pairs of both species.

In 2011, least tern productivity on USFWS sites was 0.31 fledged chicks per pair and pair numbers totaled 84. Least tern numbers decreased significantly from 2010 when 443 pairs nested on Sandy Point. This colony most likely nested somewhere else this year due to the low nesting success last year as a result of gulls depredating tern chicks. High predation pressure continues to be the main reason for nest failure and low fledging rates at other breeding sites too.

Funding for this program comes from a cooperative agreement with the State of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. This state wildlife grant is an agreement that funds piping plover management for 2009-2012. This grant is made possible through match provided by landowners and volunteers. Landowners contribute matching funds in a variety of ways from employing security guards to hiring naturalists, as well as time spent on duties related to plover management. Volunteers monitor plover populations as well as educate the public, and play a key role in increasing our presence on the beaches. In 2011, landowners provided approximately \$69,330 of in-kind match and volunteers contributed approximately \$64,760 towards the grant. The continued success of this program can be attributed to the many partnerships between organizations, government agencies and landowners who all work together to protect this rare, charismatic shorebird.



Piping plover tending to its nest. Napatree Point, Westerly, RI. (Photo taken by Janice Sassi July 15, 2011)



Piping plover chick finding refuge under beach grass. Napatree Point, Westerly, RI. (Photo taken by Janice Sassi, July)



Banded plover at Ninigret tidal flats. bird was banded in the Bahamas during the winter of 2010. In 2011 she attempted to nest at Trustum Pond NWR but abandoned the nest on May 31. She then attempted to nest in MA and abandoned that nest too. She was sighted here back in Rhode Island on July 7. Photo Credit: Bob Weaver



Kevin Rogers, biological technician, surveys the beach for piping plover nests at Napatree Point, Westerly, Rhode Island. - Photo Credit: Janice Sassi